

M O D E R N

# MOTOR

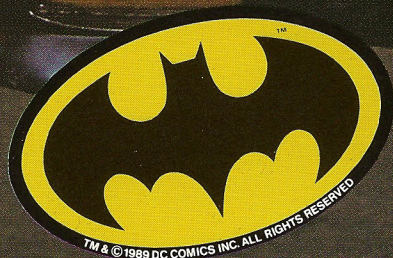
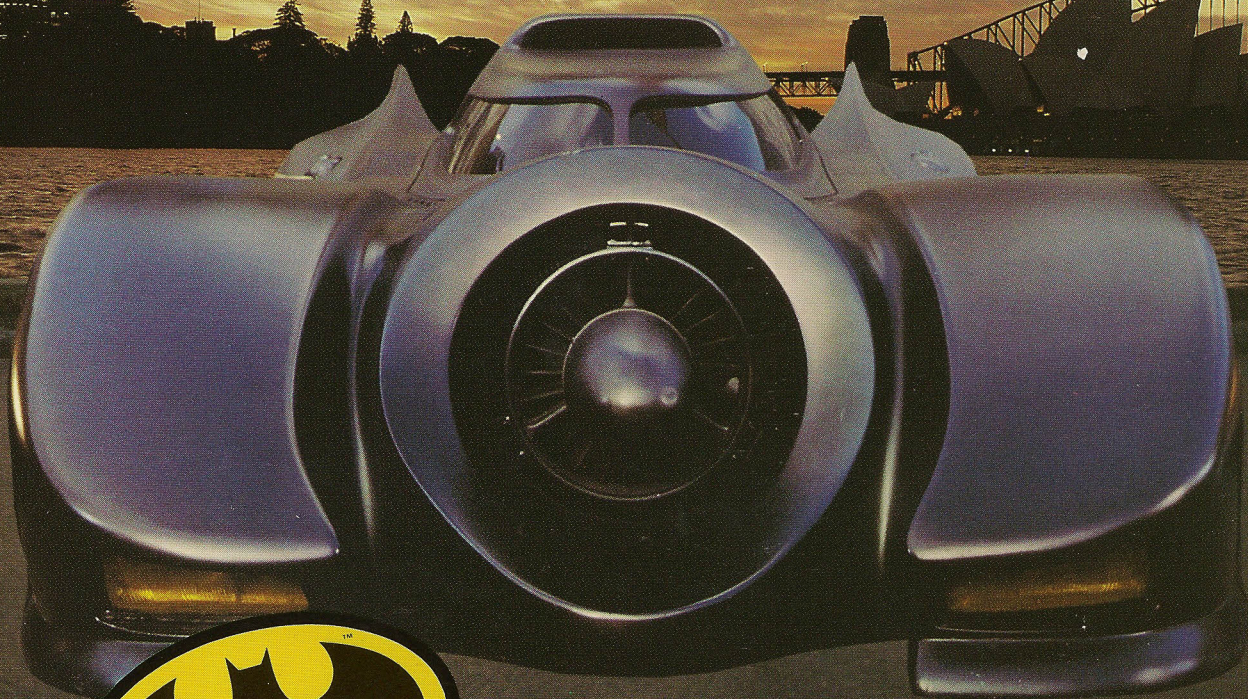
OCTOBER 1989

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## HOW WE MADE THE BATMOBILE

By H.G. Nelson



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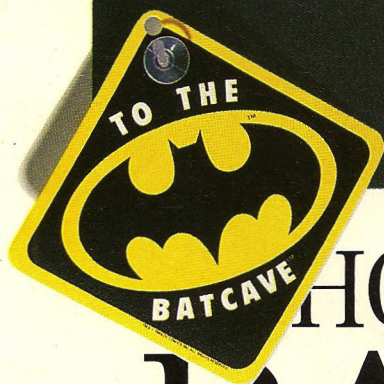
*Drive — BMW Z1 Roadster*

*Big Comparo — Peugeot 205 GTi  
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# HOW WE BUILT THE BATMOBILE

THE UNTOLD STORY OF A MOTORING FANTASY COME TRUE.  
HOLLYWOOD COMES TO LITHGOW!

BY H.G. NELSON\*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRENT MELTON AND GEORGIA MOXHAM





## THE CALL

Holy Toledo, revheads and snooker buffs, this time last year I got a phone call out of the blue round 11.30 one mid winters' night. The moon was up and the dogs were on the howl. It was a call that was to change my life.

I was over the moon when I realised I was talking to Tim Burton, the director of the new-look, old-fashioned, pre-Robin *Batman* movie. I had him on the blower from his Palo Alto hideaway Stateside. Quite simply, he was ringing to ask the Slaven Nelson Group to design and build the Batmobile.

## THE BRIEF

The Batmobile order was a dream

come true. The Group is no stranger to the big jobs but at that time our Lithgow-based production line was flat out banging out the 1989 Slanel range. We halted the line and cleared the decks for Bataction.

My partner in crime, Rampaging Roy Slaven, the man they call the Australian Enzo Ferrari, downed his tools and assembled the Batteam out back in the shed. We sealed ourselves to secrecy, signing our names to the Bat deed in blood.

We threw on our thinking caps, fired up a cheroot, got a couple of large ones poured, locked horns and gave the specs T.B. had dictated by fax a good hard geek.

As nearly as we could tell from

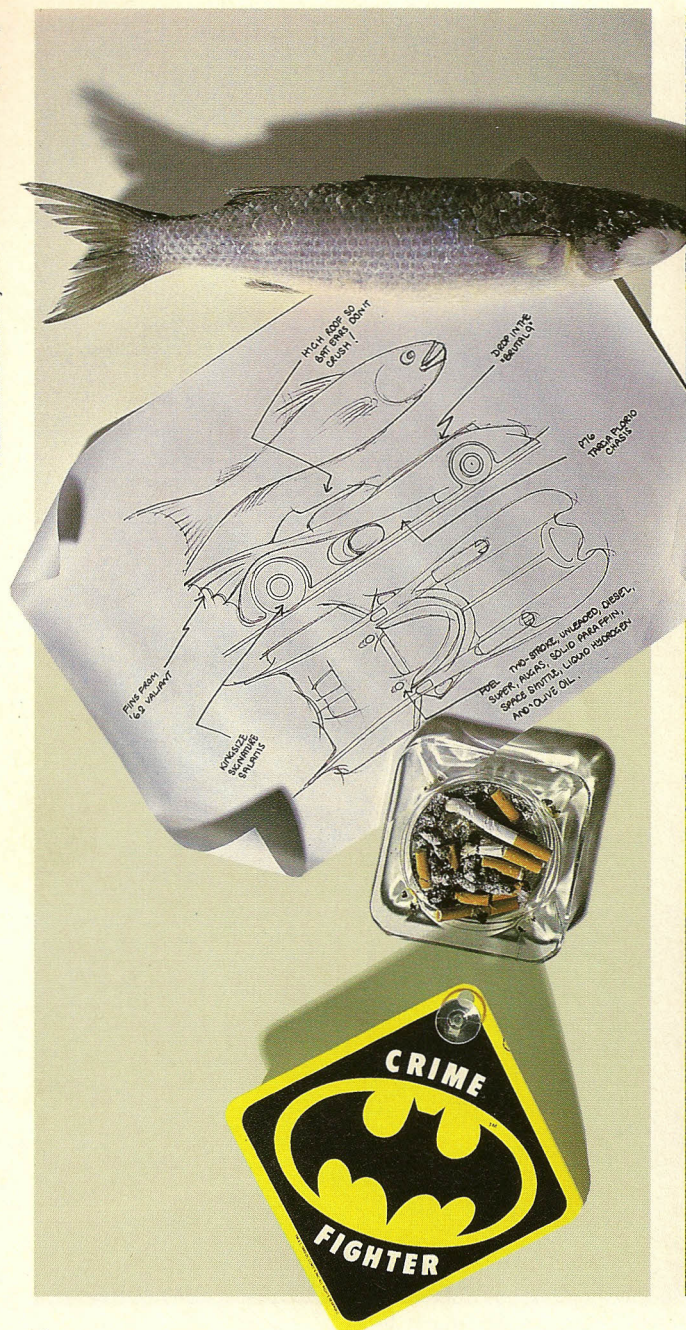
his hand drawn notes and design suggestions faxed to our Lithgow HQ the new Batmobile was to be a quiet, unassuming set of wheels. The sort of unit that could follow a suspect through the Gotham City streets without pulling the head of every passing late mail specialist and track tout; these streets, so filled with evil that even young Robin was not allowed to be part of the crime fighting team, though so desperately needed in the perennial fight against villains everywhere. Tim wanted, or at least our interpretation of his scribble suggested he wanted, something tasty with European lines and a smooth ride that would not shake the camera off its mounts.



**The tyres of the Batmobile are an all meat compound cut from a roll of Roy Slaven's Kingsize signature salami and moulded to fit the alloy wheel.**

**The compound is heat toughened for the hard work of booting up a Batmobile.**





**Where does the spare go? The donga up front holds the secret for your spare worries.**

### THE BEAST TAKES SHAPE

With this as our main objective, we got to work knocking up a design buck that same night to get a feel for the Bat beast.

Straight away Roy set about pushing the edge of the design envelope inside out. The only thing we could find out in the shed to model up the buck with was a dozen frozen mullet that Roy had stashed in the freezer. The mullet, side on, with a couple of whacks from the cold chisel, became the basic elevation of the Batmobile.

### THE THEORY

I need to outline a little of the group's philosophy concerning the car design caper. There have been many magic moments in



automotive design in the last fifty years. Look back over the card yourself, take time to give the history a good hard geek.

There was the full blown genius of the Ford Edsel, the controlled inspiration of the Nissan Cedric, and the eye to the future that informed the creation of Leyland P76.

Roy and myself decided to overlook these highpoints and follow our own gut feeling about crime, police work and the whole Batman story.

In throwing together the box and dice, the first cab from the rank was the '62 Valiant. The fins at the rear make a bold, horizontal statement as well as reminding you where to find the spare is

every time you look at the boot.

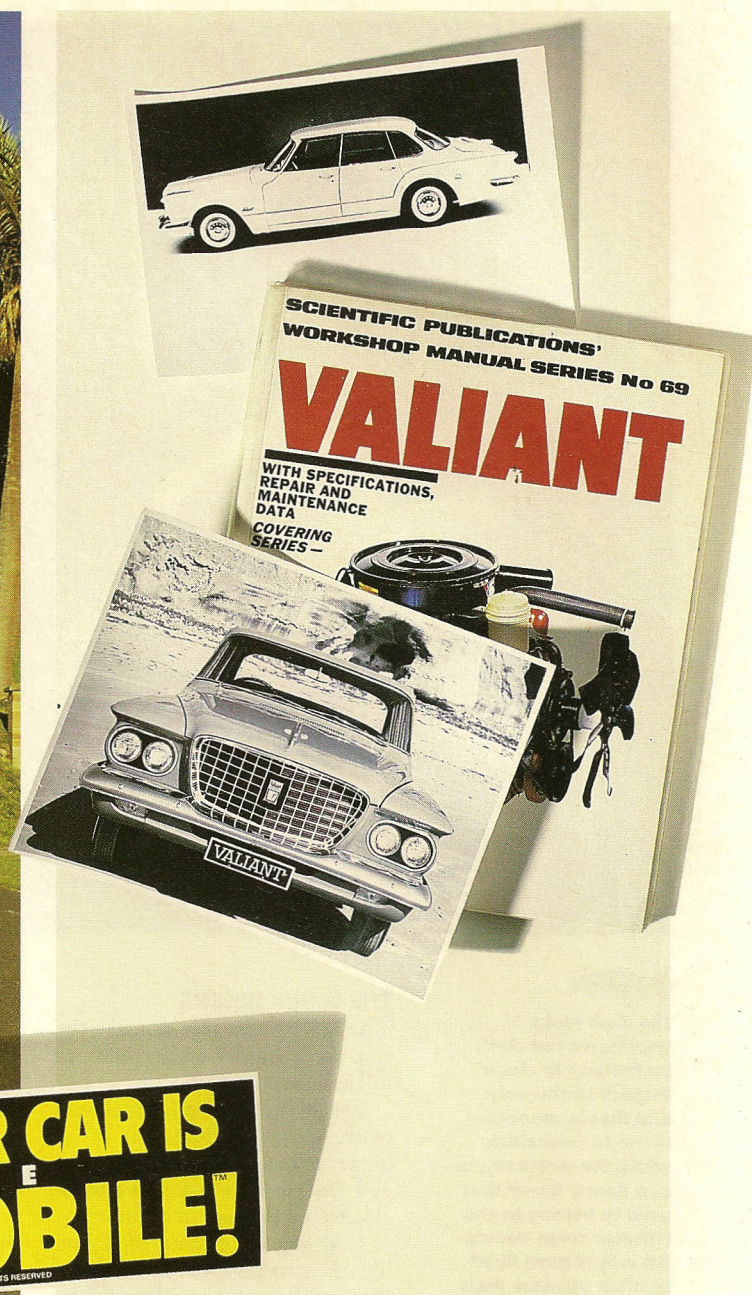
Up front at the business end the B-team settled on a touch of the Tucker. The pointy end in the Batmobile is a tribute to that great individualist — as well as providing a convenient place for that extra spare when you seek a bit of off-road action.

These two design motifs form an axis over which the rest of the unit is draped.

Roy and I never made any secret of our admiration for the mod motor scooters that cruised Britain in the mid sixties and occasionally bob up in Fine Young Cannibal film clips of today. These are a deadset inspiration to any designer.

I know I have spoken elsewhere





about my life long affection for Enzo Ferrari. He said to me just before he died: "H.G., I wish I had their courage to just keep adding mirrors, lights and nic nacs until the Vespa or Lambretta grinds to a halt under its own weight. Just imagine a fire red Dino with fifty seven head lamps on board." I just nodded knowingly as Enzo passed away, working and creating to the very end.

#### BACK TO THE BEAST

Once we had fashioned the mullet buck we did extensive testing in the methane driven wind tunnel rigged up in a shed next door to the Lithgow abattoirs. On into the night, week after week, we fiddled with the buck, the wind tun-

nels and the drawing board, looking for the right mix of elements, with Roy driving us until the team dropped.

We scarcely ate, sleeping at the benches.

One night, we collapsed with exhaustion and as the sun rose the following morning six months after we began our quest, it dawned on us that we had it.

The Batmobile was there melting in our hands. We threw the prototype into the freezer.

The final tunnel tests proved our suspicions. We were looking at the 1989 Batmobile.

We rushed the buck from the Lithgow wind tunnels to the Dutch floatation labs that told Benny Lexcen in '83 he was on the

right track when he burst through the doors with the winged keel tucked under his arm, shouting "Hey blokes, have a scrute at this and tell me if it will float?"

The tank tests, using the coloured dyes, showed that we had stumbled across a deadset inversion of the normal state of affairs with the Batmobile prototype.

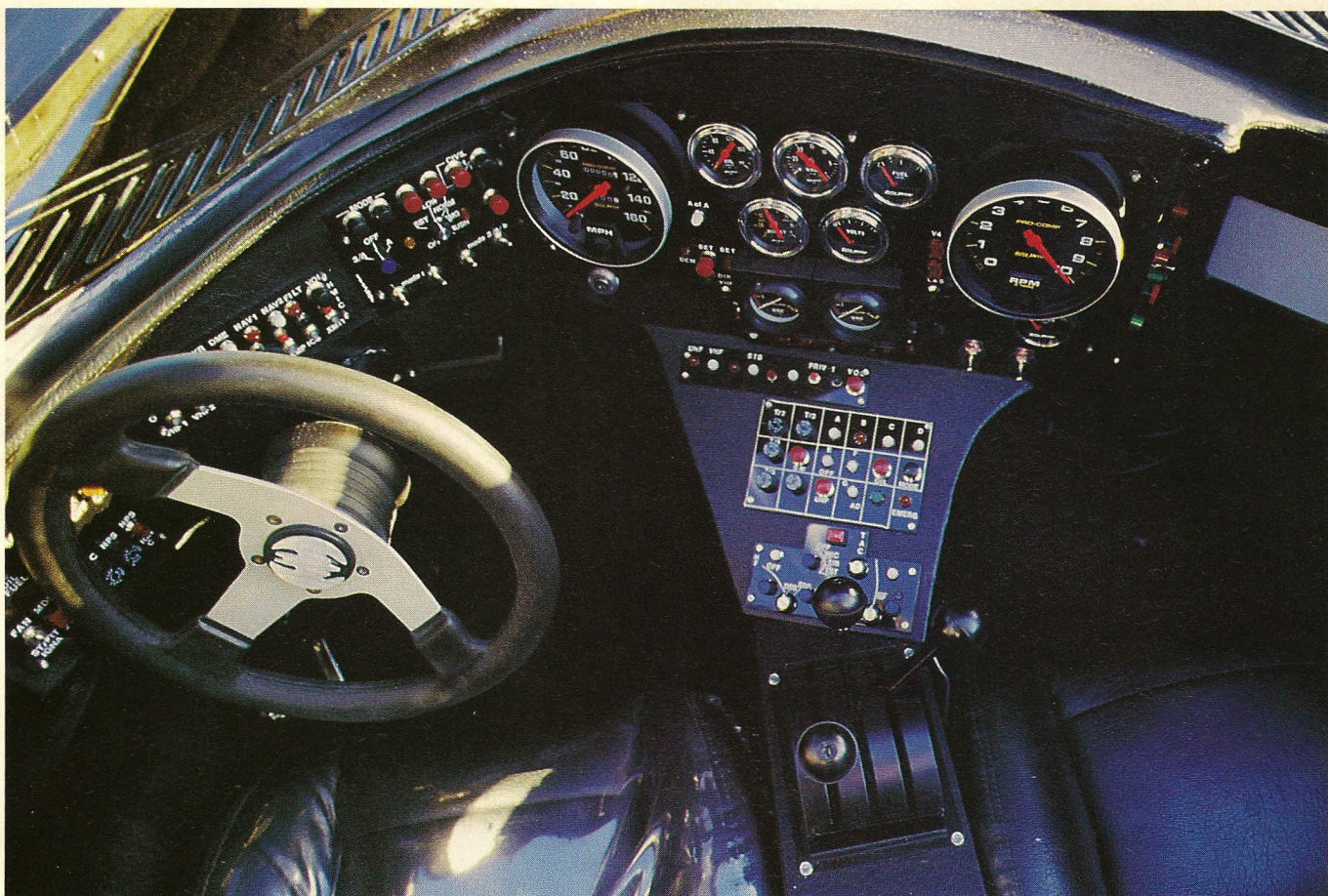
The tests proved conclusively that the car could travel at greater speeds in reverse than forward — a secret feature that gives Batman the edge in tight situations where the unusual is called for. After all, surprise is the only element that keeps Mister B ahead of the Joker, the Riddler, the Penguin and the dreaded Mr Freeze.



The paint work is radar absorbing duco maintained with a daily wipe from the salami shammy which creates a rust free surface.

As you can see it's an ideal unit to follow the mates home from a wild party without drawing attention to yourself.





The dash looks impressive but don't be fooled. On closer inspection the only dial that is connected is the 24 hour clock which we wrecked out of a Range Rover that used to belong to the Lithgow town doctor. We would have liked to hitch up more dials but time beat us.

The afterburn lever and the seat ejector button are located conveniently between Batman and where Robin would sit if he was in the show.

### THE WORK BEGINS

The B team was able to make the step from model mullet buck to full scale fabrication.

Originally Roy and myself had conceived the whole unit as no bigger than a Mini Minor or a Fiat 500. But the film makers were not able to see Batman in a Mini.

Call me old fashioned if you like. But to give them their due this was the only time they did interfere. And I take my hat off to them for that freedom.

Tim Burton, Michael Keaton and Jack Nicholson all spoke to us about getting some length into the beast.

We took this on board as a serious request from the artistic coal face. What could I say about my vision, they were paying the bills.

### THE CHASSIS

We began at the bottom with the chasis. We were stuck, we didn't know where to turn. And then we stumbled on a Leyland P76 Targa Florio that just happened to be sitting out front of the works, left there by the disgruntled Slaven Nelson Group's accountant.

This gave us length.

We stretched it with an exten-

sion of 7.6 metres.

The filmmakers wanted length. We would give them length. The body of the Batmobile is built up from styled Slaven Plank and aerodynamically finished off with heat treatment to smooth away the joins.

To get the required width we laminated the plank in a vertical and horizontal mosaic and stuck it together with a new super glue, Dinko Lukinitis.

### THE DONK

It was looking a picture but the real battle had just begun.

"What about the Donk," Roy panted one morning as we pushed the beast up onto the jack to have a go at the tail light wiring.

By this stage the Batmobile was getting so heavy and we needed to work a power pack up from scratch.

Ralph Sarich had offered the project a 16-valve orbital outboard for the beast but somehow the aesthetic line of the design was broken with a couple of big bulges up back. We wanted a nice line that allowed the flow of air to pin the monster to the road. Nissan offered a V12 prototype that was going to be dropped into the '91

EXA. Toyota rang to insist we use a very new piece of gear from its HiAce dragster that powered the HiAce to the World Van Titles in Sacramento last year. We were not satisfied that any of these could deliver.

We settled on Roy's Brutal 9, a brand new turbine driven prototype. This power pack has been well documented in the car mags. A brilliant piece of lateral thinking from the House of Slaven.

The car tooled up with The 9 belongs in the six second club and when you approach the ton you feel as though you are crashing through the sound barrier, which is a very nice touch. But the principle is quite simple: the fuel mixture is exploded in conventional cylinders in the ceramic, liquid-cooled engine block and then through the manifold ducting. The hot gas is forced into a turbine located alongside each wheel. The air rushes through the blades of the turbine and directly drives thirty four inch wheels.

The Brutal 9 gives the Batmobile phenomenal poke over the critical first two hundred metres.

The 9 will run on any sort of fuel — two stroke, unleaded,



# THE REAL BATMOBILE

Not one but *two* Batmobiles were built for the movie. Designer of the beast was Anton Furst, who says the movie set out to portray a "darker, more disturbing kind of Batman" and that the car, like its driver, had to be more threatening and intimidating than its common representation in comics. Inspiration for the design was a vague mix of Bonneville Salt Flat racers and Stingrays of the '50s, with a solid dose of the designer team's own expressionism thrown in.

Putting the design into reality was the job of Terry Ackland-Snow, whose chief

problems were typically Hollywood — lack of time and money. GM originally wanted to base the Batmobile on a Corvette showcar, but was talking two years. Warner Bros was thinking of *10 weeks!*

Special effects expert John Evans, whose credits include Superman, Indiana Jones, and seven James Bond films, was charged with the job of creating the cars. He began searching for two examples that were long, wide, inexpensive, and capable of riding smoothly (for the sake of the camera). A couple of aged Chevy Impalas did the trick for only \$11,000. First each chassis was

extended 30 inches; the driveshafts were lengthened by 18 inches; spacers boosted the rear track to 97 inches; and the engine was dropped a foot to accommodate Furst's low hoodline.

But the really tricky part, according to the creators, was the fine-tuning of the afterburners. It was supposed to look like a core of solid flame. A mixture of air and paraffin was just the thing.

## WHERE YOU CAN SEE THE BATMOBILE

The Batmobile is in Australia for a minimum of 12 months, having been brought

here under licence by Henry Hess International Pty Ltd for exhibition at various venues around the country. The car will be one of the stars at this year's International Motor show in Sydney from October 6-15, and can also be seen at the Wollongong Festival (October 23-29), the Canberra Hot Rod and Custom Car Exhibition (at the Convention Centre, November 3-5), K mart stores in Sydney and Melbourne (November and December) and Sea World, Gold Coast (December 26-January 29). For hire inquiries phone Henry Hess International, (02) 439 5488.

diesel, super, Avgas, solid paraffin mix, Space Shuttle, liquid hydrogen and olive oil. The curious thing is no matter what fuel is tipped into the tank, economy remains the same point five of a kilometre per litre.

The gearing is simple viscous coupling, but in retrospect the power to weight ratio is all wrong, accentuating the hardtop's tendency to understeer.

## POLISH

Once we had these central ingredients in place and were confident enough we had the stab to pull the skin off the custard, we were able to satisfy Bruce Wayne's personal touches. Batman wanted leather slip seats to prevent the cape from catching in those quick getaways.

Bruce suggested a higher roof-line on the hot rod so as the canopy didn't knock his ears off when the air ram slammed the lid of the widowmaker shut.

Movie fans, this is a pre-Robin bag of tricks, there is no room for that cute talk from Dick as soon as The Cape Crusaders slip in to the conveyance having slid down the Bat Pole:

"Atomic Batteries to power. Turbines to speed. Ready to move out".

That is the history of the story that lies before us. When you see the movie try to recall the work of a couple of young Aussie battlers who made their dreams a reality with the Batmobile.

## THE BOAST

We feel that our work is on a par with the creation of interscan, the over the horizon radar, the solar telephone, Benny's winged keel, and the electric brick.

When will the local industry be able to

take the Batmobile on board? The Slaven Nelson group is banging out prototype model number three and is hoping to put the beast into production in limited numbers to take on Brockie at Bathurst and Professor Prost at the Adelaide Grand Prix in 1992.

*\*H.G. Nelson is a Sydney motoring entrepreneur, and financial and sports guru.*

*He can be heard with partner Roy Slaven in Sydney every Saturday between 2 and 6pm on radio 2JFF when they present "This Sporting Life".*

Auto Fashions, the manufacturer and distributor of various officially licensed Bat-goodies have made available Bat packs for the first 50 readers to write in to MODERN MOTOR BATPACK, GPO Box 4088, Sydney NSW 2001.

The packs contain a sun screen, key ring, bumper sticker and waving traffic stopper. Total value is over \$20. The products are available individually from leading automotive outlets and gift stores everywhere.



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